

## The 2005 Arlington Bluebell Walk & Farm Trail

It has been a remarkable year as we had the highest number of visitors in our 33 year history. They totalled around 14,000 and nearly half arrived over the Bank Holiday Weekend, as the sun was shining and with the Bluebells looking at their best, this allowed their memorable scent to permeate Beatons Wood. It was the weekend of Arlington Church and Stella Myerson, with all her helpers, did a fantastic job in coping with that volume of people, and did not even run out of cakes! We are grateful to Peter Appleton and his staff at Parkwood Farm, as their priority that weekend appeared to be dealing with the large number of the public who wanted to see the milking, rather than the cows!

The introduction of the Mini Farmers Market was a major factor for increasing the visitor experience. It was run for the benefit of (HOPS) the Hailsham Old Pavilion Society who were inundated by visitors, wanting to purchase the delicious farm produced icecreams, home made jams & marmalades, free range eggs and organic apple & pear juice. All the products were sourced from Sussex producers and will now be an integral part of next year's Bluebell Walk.

Many of you no doubt saw Carolyn on BBC1 Southern News, broadcast the day before the election. It was highlighting the threat to our delicate native bluebells from the spanish introduction that has no scent, coarse stem and leaves, and sadly appears to be prevalent in so many gardens.

Parking this year caused little problem, mainly due to Henry McCutchan laying the roadside hedge in the traditional way, so allowing the grass verge to remain dry and firm for cars, when we felt the car park field should be shut after overnight rain. We had one mishap in that a coach driver, whom we found out later, could speak, but not understand the English language, took it onto himself to drive into the field and promptly became bogged down. Thanks to Peter Appleton and his staff with **two** 4 wheeled tractors, it was extracted, but the scars to the field will remain for a long time, so reminding us of that saga.

We are grateful to both the Appleton and Johnston families who open their land so the Farm Trail element of our title is a reality for our visitors to enjoy. We have had such favourable comments on the new signs that have appeared on these Walks including the additional seats, all helping to enhance our visitors' day out to Arlington Bluebell Walk.

Carolyn and I with Anne Hope are already busy planning for the 2006 Walk, with the major change of going back to a **four** weekend event, keeping our fingers crossed that the dates we choose, will coincide with nature who decides when the bluebells will flower. We are helped in our planning by another audit arranged by Tourism South East, so we will build on this year's improvements, making sure we do not lose that special magic that so many visitors experience. An email this year declared 'I find it's a bit like the feeling you get on entering a cathedral – awesome, and a very special place to be'. That says it all.

John McCutchan